and in many ways overlooks some important factors which must take us beyond an overly inclusive analysis of the girl experience.

Kisha McPherson works full time as a college professor at Centennial College in Toronto and is currently pursuing a PhD at York University, with a focus on popular culture, media, and identity development of black girls.

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AWKWARD POLITICS: TECHNOLOGIES OF POPFEMINIST ACTIVISM

Carrie Smith-Prei & Maria Stehle
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016

REVIEWED BY VERONIKA NOVOSELOVA

In *Awkward Politics* Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle analyze what they call popfeminist protests – collaborative, artistic, and disruptive performances circulated transnationally through multi-media digital networks. Smith-Prei and Stehle define *popfeminism* as a methodology for critiquing, appropriating, and re-signifying pop culture while infusing it with feminist meanings; they deploy popfeminist methodology to explore awkwardness as the central characteristic of the contemporary feminist mobilizing. According to Smith-Prei and Stehle, awkwardness refers to actions, representations, and aesthetics that come across as ill-fitting and misdirected but also disruptive and provocative. The focus on awkwardness helps to understand irony, playfulness, and political ambiguity of feminist performances driven by information sharing technologies.

Grounded in affect theory, Smith-Prei and Stehle conduct close readings of popfeminist performances, their digital transmissions, and their connections to the earlier forms of feminist protest such as street demonstrations, petitions, interruptions of public events, the Riot Grrrl Movement, and DIY aesthetics. The significant part of the book focuses on feminist protests in the German context, including performances of Chicks on Speed collective and rapper Lady Bitch Ray; it also examines global circulations of "sextrimist" Ukrainian group FEMEN, Russian punk collective Pussy Riot, and the SlutWalk movement that gained a transnational following after originating in Canada.

Smith-Prei and Stehle elaborate on the circularity of feminist actions, meaning that these actions migrate between online and offline contexts, acquiring new meanings and drawing the layers of commentary. The uncoordinated flows of feminist content between online channels complicates further their already unstable political aims; given this fragmentary and discontinuous character of digital protests, Smith-Prei and Stehle suggest that contemporary feminist politics is not necessarily "measurable by its successes or failure on numerous issues standard to feminist analysis." Distancing themselves from the claim to evaluate popfeminism's effectiveness, they ask "not if, but how, such protest works politically."

As the authors point out, digitally-enabled feminist protests uneasily intertwine the anti-capitalist ethos with commercial circulations, revealing that "there is no 'outside' of capitalism in a global neoliberal economy." Popfeminist protests include "pop and consumer tendencies" in a way that "not only rewrite neoliberal capitalism but also repackage themselves as part of that cycle." For example, Smith-Prei and Stehle analyze the "awkward" positionings and circulations of Pussy Riot within the contemporary popular culture; first, Smith-Prei and Stehle identify how "awkwardness" is visible in the contradiction between the cutting edge quality of Pussy Riot's performances and the ways in which Russian-based feminisms are commonly described in terms of "catching up" to the West. Next, they trace how the public image of Pussy Riot has been shifting, revealing tensions between the global popularity and local specificity, between anonymity of the collective and celebrity of Pussy Riot's members Alekhina and Tolokonnikova. Another example of how mainstream and counter-cultural meanings coalesce is the 2013 #aufschrei campaign centering on women's disclosures of experiencing sexual assault. Smith-Prei and Stehle emphasize the contradiction between the politically disruptive impetus behind #aufschrei campaign and the way in which the hashtag has been uncritically taken up by Germany's mainstream media. Both of these case studies point out the awkward disjunctions between the subversive potential of feminist politics and the ongoing commodification of feminist rhetoric.

Drawing on Lauren Berlant's conceptualization of cruel optimism as an affective attachment to the visions of normative futures, the authors argue that feminist awkwardness is "politically productive not because it decidedly incites political discourse or challenges social conventions in general but because it unsettles and disrupts any such fantasies

of the good life." Smith-Prei and Stehle conclude with a call to bring popfeminism to the academy and embrace the awkward as a way to expose contradictions, ruptures, and tensions of feminist activism in the neoliberal context.

Veronika Novoselova completed her PhD in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University. She is interested in exploring the interconnections between gender, networked publics, and digital politics. Her other interests include transnational cultural production on digital media and open-access publishing. Veronika is currently serving as a Managing Editor at Feral Feminisms, an open-access journal based in Toronto.

SCREENING IMAGES OF AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN THE AGE OF POSTFEMINISM

Elizabeth Abele & John A. Gronbeck-Tedesco, Eds.
New York: Lexington Books, 2016

REVIEWED BY DANI SPINOSA

At the start of the introduction to this volume, editor Elizabeth Abele clarifies the "postfeminism" that frames the essays therein as being used "in its temporal sense, designating the period from the late 1980s on ... as a period when feminist concepts had clearly impacted American society and culture." While not a reinvention of the term, this definition does a good job of situating these essays, seeing "postfeminism" as an aftermath, and looking at how masculinity and social relations after feminism (in its various forms) irreparably ruptured the comfortableness of early twentieth-century gender roles. While this volume collects very different essays on very different films, television shows, and actors, the one thing that unites them is a close look at how the waves of feminism affected the men in their wakes.

The best and most engaging essays in this volume are ones that move away from the jargon-laden tradition of feminist criticism without losing the intersectionality and materialism that came out of it. Michael Litwack's racialized study of *Miami Vice*, Dustin Gann's queer-inflected reading of *Frasier*, and Derek S. McGrath's refusal to adhere to a definitive statement on the politics of Josh Whedon's *The Avengers* films, are all good examples of the way that difficult concepts in gender and queer theory can be adapted to popular media without falling too far into elitist jargon or populist pontificating. Of special note on this topic is Katie Barnett's poignant and thoughtful look at Robin Williams's various representations of fatherhood; the prescient turn to Williams's own depression and suicide foregrounds, in a very real way, the societal pressures of postfeminist masculinity not only on the characters studied throughout this volume, but on real men and lived experience.

The essays in this volume are also, for the most part, refreshingly marked with a sense of humour that makes their reading quite enjoyable. The task of humorous and engaging writing is made easier when you are writing on primary texts that are hilarious in their own right, as is the case with Pamela Hill Nettleton's study of *Nip/Tuck* and *Boston Legal*. But, Litwack's aforementioned study and Laura L. Beading's excellent look at *Firefly*'s Mal Reynolds are also as funny as they are careful in their look at the changing face of masculinity post-feminism. These essays navigate postfeminist masculinity's high emphasis on homosocial bonds alongside the uneasiness of these characters' retained desire to be saviour, knight, and leader beside their frequently strong and outspoken female peers.

The stand-out essay, for this reviewer, is Maureen McKnight's thoughtful, reflective, and politically-savvy look at *Mad Men*'s Don Draper. McKnight's refusal to withdraw the scholar from the scholarly work is useful both as a framing device for the essay, and as a way of foregrounding how her discussion of nostalgia in the show relies so heavily on the audience's affective engagement with the characters. McKnight starts this essay with a lovely claim to personal engagement—"I've always been fascinated by the visually arresting opening credits for [*Mad Men*]"—and continues through a close reading of one of the most iconic credit sequences of the last decade with ease and pathos. She connects this sequence, thoughtfully, to Richard Drew's "the Falling Man" photograph from 9/11 and considers the place of Jon Hamm's Draper in the context of a 2007 looking back, and the 1960s of the show, framed by its knowledge of what would come next. The result is a character study that made me longingly return to the show after having stopped watching years ago.

All in all, the essays in this volume are thoughtful, interesting, and enjoyable to read. While some essays collected here set their scopes too large and ultimately fail to engage on the level that the essays mentioned here do, all are worthwhile reads for those interested in the politics or in the primary texts themselves. This volume follows in a long line of other, similar, studies of masculinity in contemporary media but it still makes a worthwhile contribution to that conversation.

Dani Spinosa is Adjunct Professor of English Literature at York University. Her work has previously appeared in ESC: English Studies in Canada, the Canadian Review of American Studies,